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Creating Notions of Transculturality

The Work of Fernando Ortiz and his Impact on Europe

In the age of globalization, we cannot reflect about Comparative Literary Studies and *Languages of Theory* without contemplating how cross-liminality and transculturality¹ might be lived in a mobile, medialized and rapidly changing world. Art and literature have always mirrored, transmitted and evaluated critically social, moral, and aesthetical values. How, then, can this task be fulfilled on a transnational literary and cultural level in a rapidly growing world community of letters, authors and readers?

In this paper, I would like to promote the notion of *transculturality*, first proposed as a basic model of conviviality by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) in the 1940s and then, from the 1990s onwards, taken up and adapted, both terminologically and conceptually, to Third Millennium culture by the German philosopher and theorist of postmodernity Wolfgang Iser (b. 1926). I will argue that at this moment in history, in the interest of peacemaking and sustainability and for the sake of humanity, transcultural skills and a shared understanding of transcultural coexistence, both theoretical and practical, are indispensable. From a methodological point of view that is related to the History of Knowledge, I will begin chronologically by introducing the work of Fernando Ortiz and then briefly tracing the reception of his most crucial cultural analysis in order to connect, in a second sub-chapter, its theoretical interests to Wolfgang Iser's publications. In a third step, I will briefly demonstrate the potential of the transcultural approach by showing paradigmatically its applicability to a colonial (Italian) novel, reread, as it were, through a transcultural lens, before coming to my conclusions.

1. Fernando Ortiz: *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940/47)

As early as, or, depending on how we look at it, as long ago as 1940, the lawyer, jurist, sociologist, and musical ethnologist, the writer and founder of Cuban anthropology Fernando Ortiz published a remarkable, yet somewhat enigmatic book; it was entitled *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940), written in Spanish and accompanied with a constitutive introduction by the British-Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, then affiliated with Yale University.

1 Regarding this research field, German scholars have been particularly attentive to the recent discussion about 'transculturality' and 'transculturation;' for further reading see *Transkulturalität. Klassische Texte*. Ed. Andreas Langenohl et al. Bielefeld: transcript, 2015 and *Transkulturation. Literarische und mediale Grenzräume im deutsch-italienischen Kulturkontakt*. Ed. Vittoria Borsò and Heike Brohm. Bielefeld: transcript, 2007.

Only seven years later, a translation into English was issued by the New Yorker publishing house Alfred A. Knopf, which was reprinted in 1965, but with a supplementary introduction by the US-scholar Fernando Coronil (1944-2011). It provided the reader with an extended edition that contained new textual material penned by Ortiz himself four years before he passed away.

Thus well-positioned in the context of the leading left-wing Anglophone critical US-discourses right from the start, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* was quite rapidly translated, by Harriet De Onís in 1947, and introduced into the international book-market under the English title *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, a name that remained the same for the second edition. Its author, the prolific polymath Fernando Ortiz Fernández, his full name, was born in 1881 to a Cuban mother and a Spanish father in Havana, where he also died in 1969. The significance of his publication is due not only to the fact that it authoritatively valorized the *cultura negra* of the Afro-Cubans as early as the 1940s but, as we will see, also coined the term *transculturación* as a neologism, which would turn out to be of great theoretical importance from the point of view of Globalization Studies.

Born in Havana and raised partially in Menorca, where he spent part of his childhood, Ortiz studied Law in Barcelona and Madrid, before beginning to work in Spain and Italy as a member of the Cuban diplomatic consular corps in A Coruña, Genoa and Marseille, and thus himself gaining plenty of transcultural experience abroad. From 1931 to 1933, Ortiz was exiled to the USA after he had turned against the Cuban dictator Gerardo Machado (1871-1939) in a manifesto. He then returned to Cuba and became judge of the Cuban courts and founding president of the Cuban peace movement in 1949. Ortiz wrote on law issues, Afro-Cuban matters, music, criminology, sociology, history, and politics, also editing various collections of Cuban literary classics. Since his death, the Fernando Ortiz Foundation has guarded his spiritual and written heritage under the direction of the Cuban anthropologist and novelist Miguel Barnet.

Today's readers might find that *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* is a very hybrid text, a text split in two. This is due to the circumstance that the modern edition combines the original manuscript from 1940 (Spanish) or 1947 (English), which since 1963 (Spanish)² or 1965 (English),³ have formed "Part I" of today's eponymous book, while "Part II" reproduces commentaries and rich

2 Jacques-François Bonaldi mentions a revised Spanish edition, enriched by some two hundred pages (i. e., "Part II" of the final version) dating back to 1963 and published by the Central University of Las Villas in his "Prologue" to the French translation of Ortiz' masterpiece (Fernando Ortiz. *Controverse cubaine entre le tabac et le sucre. Leurs contrastes agraires, économiques, historiques et sociaux, leur ethnographie et leur transculturation*. Trans. Jacques-François Bonaldi. Ed. Jérôme Poinot. Montréal/Québec: Mémoire d'encrier, 2011).

3 The English translation of 1965 is currently available in a version reprinted in 1995: Fernando Ortiz. *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Trans. Harriet De Onís. With an introduction by Bronislaw Malinowski [...]. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2003⁴ [1995]. In 1970, the New York publishing house Vintage also launched the eponymous English translation.—It is precisely this edition published

additional materials that Ortiz only added for the latter edition of the 1960s and distributed over 12 single additional chapters with which he wanted to pinpoint his transcultural concerns (which he, in fact, succeeded in doing), thus giving a more fragmented and tight scientific character to the second half of the volume. The first part, entitled “Cuban Counterpoint,” is one homogeneous text: in his “Introduction,” Ortiz depicts the general contrast, the moral contrast, and the religious-magic aspects of the cultivation of the two plants, tobacco and sugar. He also describes modes of transport, packaging, merchandizing, modalities of production, and socio-political as well as commercial aspects of the commodities tobacco and sugar. Details concerning the handcraft and history of labor finally lead to Ortiz’ conclusion of this “Part I.”

“Part II,” on the other hand, added to the English version only in 1965 (then reprinted—in this extended version—in 1970 and 1995) is introduced by the long title “The Ethnography and Transculturation of Havana Tobacco and the Beginnings of Sugar in America,” announcing not only an academic tone, but also Ortiz’ interest in transcultural issues. Let me just mention three of the 12 chapter headings that show the repetitive use of the term ‘transculturation’ or other ‘trans’-compounds and, therefore, clearly express Ortiz’ focus: “The Social Phenomenon of ‘Transculturation’ and its Importance” (chapter 2), “The Transculturation of Tobacco” (chapter 7), or “The First Transatlantic Shipments of Sugar” (chapter 11). Summarizing the main discourses and themes of “Part I” and “Part II,” we see that, again, they differ visibly in terms of form and style. The “Cuban counterpoint” (i. e., “Part I”) explains that the notion of ‘counterpoint’ (‘contrapunteo’) was adapted by Ortiz from popular Cuban music, where it defines: 1) the technique of combining two or more different melodies following certain rules, and 2) the contrast of two things by reflecting the “dramatic dialectic of life.”⁴ Moreover, Ortiz might have been pleased by the idea that the term ‘counterpoint’ insinuates the notion of a counter-discourse, a technique or strategy of *writing-back* as Salman Rushdie would put it later in his article, “The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance” (1982), and that it evokes the vision of a certain genuineness, of cultural resilience or possibly even a culture balanced in (melodic) harmony.

The double meaning of the lexeme ‘counterpoint,’ however, reflects the dualistic, binary structure of Ortiz’ essay in the form of a counterpoint-designed play or of a poetic *mise en abyme*. “Part I” features even more narrative techniques and stylistic devices, as it may be read as a parody of the allegorical poem *El libro de buen amor* (1330), authored by the Spanish priest and poet Juan Ruíz, and mentioned by Ortiz in the incipit of his book.⁵ Ortiz imitates in his *Contrapunteo* the dispute between Ruíz’ characters Don Carnal and Doña Cuaresma by creating analogous personifications of the two natural products that he is writing on, calling them “Don Tabaco” and “Doña Azúcar.”⁶ Moreover, there is a

by Duke UP in 1995 that should be taken into account if one intends to research the development of the notion of ‘transculturation.’

4 Fernando Ortiz. *Cuban Counterpoint* (note 3), p. 4.

5 Cf. the very first paragraph of Ortiz’ book (*ibid.*, p. 3).

6 *Ibid.*

second intertextual—and at the level of content, of course, anti-capitalist—reference concerning *The Capital* (1867) by Karl Marx, who in a parody of the trinitarian formula represented the earth as “Madame La Terre” and the capital as “Monsieur Le Capital.”⁷

The main discourse of “Part II,” bearing the long title “The Ethnography and Transculturation [...]” is recognizably and strategically cut, however, to introduce Ortiz’ core issue—*transculturation* as a social phenomenon. It shows that “the real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations.”⁸ This conclusion is preceded by Ortiz’ crucial definition of *transculturation*, that I intend to analyze here as to its epistemological, historical and methodological impact:

With the reader’s permission, especially if he happens to be interested in ethnographic and sociological questions, I am going to take the liberty of employing for the first time the term *transculturation*, fully aware of the fact that it is a neologism. And I venture to suggest that it might be adopted in sociological terminology, to a great extent at least, as a substitute for the term *acculturation*, whose use is now spreading.⁹

N.B. that “now” for Ortiz signifies 1940—when he first thought of his neologism according to Malinowski’s introduction, even if Ortiz himself doesn’t use it yet in this very first edition—that is to say: by coining the term *transculturation*, he actually intends to criticize the colonial connotations of the term *acculturation*, to invert its deictic perspective and to linguistically recode the prospective *language of theory*. Apart from that, there is no doubt that Ortiz wanted to state unequivocally that Spanish colonialism in Cuba might be regarded as a “transculturation that failed.”¹⁰ According to Ortiz, despite the Victorian view of the Cuban indigenous people as subhuman, bestial “Negroes of Africa,”¹¹ transculturation has taken place as “the process of transition from one culture to another,”¹² so that Cuba is the result “of the transculturations of Indians, whites, Negroes, and Mongols.”¹³ Ortiz’ subversive message can easily be deduced: using poetical and baroque language in “Part I” and scientific language in “Part II,” *Cuban Counterpoint* allows for a double reading by the recipient, its complex, invisible structure mirroring the complexity of the social phenomenon of *transculturation* that he intends to introduce into the vocabulary of the reader and the academic world in general.

As Ortiz’ original essay shows, sugar and tobacco functioned in Cuba as vehicles of *transculturation*, a term that, according to the author, implicates a dynamic, integrative idea to define Cuban culture (*cubanidad*)—not race. By

7 Cf. Karl Marx. *Das Kapital*. Berlin: Dietz, 1983. Vol. 3, pp. 822-939.

8 Fernando Ortiz. *Cuban Counterpoint* (note 3), p. 98.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

exemplifying his discourse through these two useful plants, Ortiz demonstrates the hybridity of cultural processes and the ways in which they are connected to economics (foreign exploitation in particular) and politics (ideally leading to autonomy and financial advantages). Between the lines, Ortiz conveys to the reader that Cuban cultural practice is exceptionally rich because of its omnipresent counterpoint, be it in the form of a dialogue, or by sharpening various cultural discourses throughout history in the form of a polyphonic canon. Among these discourses, Ortiz insists on a *transculturation* that proceeds through migration (also slavery) and power-politics, creating new cultural phenomena (*neoculturation*). Implicating shifting identities between Indians, Europeans, and Africans, transculturation is the dialectic between up-rooting and the creation of something new, which in effect and in a broader sense is ultimately nothing less than a definition of that melting-pot, “America in general,” i. e., the USA, as per Ortiz.¹⁴

At the time of the *Cuban Counterpoint*, the literary current of Magic Realism was on the rise in Latin America: the expression was first coined by the German art critic Franz Roh (1890-1965) in 1925, directing attention away from New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) to Magic Realism, intentionally opposed to Positivism with partial openings into Surrealism. After that, the term was confirmed by the Puerto Rican author Angel Flores (1900-1992) in 1954/55, and a whole series of literary texts were subsumed under this label, ranging from the Italian novelist Massimo Bontempelli (*La donna dei miei sogni e altre avventure moderne*, 1925), to Jorge Luis Borges (*A Universal History of Infamy*, 1935), Alejo Carpentier (*The Kingdom of this World*, 1949), Garcia Marquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967) and Isabel Allende (*The House of the Spirits*, 1982), followed by various authors and œuvres in postmodern times, e.g., Günter Grass, Peter Handke, Italo Calvino, Michel Tournier, Salman Rushdie, or Toni Morrison, and others.

But Ortiz not only explained comprehensively the uniqueness of Latin America according to the spirit of Magic Realism. He was also a visionary in respect to the question why culture still mattered. His transcultural vision had considerable impact mainly on North and South American theorists such as Malinowski and, more than 40 years later, on Angel Rama (*Transculturation narrativa en América Latina*, 1982), but also on the US-American urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, who first coined the expression ‘third space’ (*The Great Good Place*, 1989), the Argentinian anthropologist Nestor Canclini (*Culturas híbridadas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, 1990), the US-theoretician of Indian descent Homi K. Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*, 1994), the Venezuelan anthropologist and US-scholar Fernando Coronil (*The Magical State*, 1997) and, finally, the German philosopher Wolfgang Iser (*Die transkulturelle Gesellschaft*, 1997).

¹⁴ Fernando Coronil. “Introduction to the Duke University Press Edition.” *Ibid.*, p. XXX.

The core message of Ortiz' theory might be read hermeneutically by revisiting the five phases of transculturation that he described during his speech at Club Atenas in Havana on December 12, 1942:¹⁵

- 1) First, the white man attacks the black man and enslaves him by force;
- 2) then the two parties find a compromise: the slave is a 'good Negro' and the colonizer is 'the good master';
- 3) at this point, an adjustment takes place, as the slave starts imitating the white man (finding that being a 'Negro' or 'Mulatto' is of minor value);
- 4) then, though, the colored man gains self-respect through self-assertion, leading to an inter-racial cooperation between colonized and colonizer;
- 5) finally, a new 'tomorrow' dawns: a *tertium quid* arises, cultures fuse, the conflict ceases, and integration appears as a new turn.

As far as this *tertium quid* is concerned, Ortiz might also have thought of *The Communist Manifesto* (*Das kommunistische Manifest*, 1848) written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, when outlining his preliminary ideas about a future *transculturality*, as Marx and Engels describe very concretely how this kind of transformation from one state to another might occur. They write: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."¹⁶

2. Wolfgang Welsch's Notion of *transculturality* (1992)

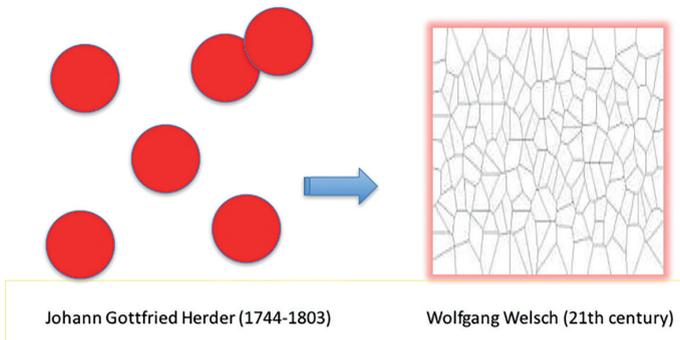
At the threshold of the 21st century, the German cultural philosopher and theorist of postmodernity Wolfgang Welsch (b. 1946)—he last taught at the University of Jena, retiring in 2012—added a third essential factor to Ortiz' idea of a *transculturation* equaling hybridization processes and connecting economy and politics: namely, the role of media. It is Ortiz' re-edition of *Cuban Counterpoint* in English, dating back to 1965 and reprinted first by the New York publisher Vintage in 1970, then by Duke University Press in 1995, that might have inspired Welsch¹⁷ to create a neologism out of a neologism and transforming Ortiz' notion of *transculturación*—which had been translated (apparently with the author's approval) from Spanish into English as *transculturation*—into

15 Cf. Fernando Ortiz. "Fernando Ortiz on the Phases of Transculturation. From a speech made at Club Atenas in Havana, December 12, 1942." <<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/race/Ortiz-2.htm>> (accessed Aug 30, 2017).

16 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [*Das kommunistische Manifest*], February 1848, p. 16. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>> (accessed Aug 30, 2017).

17 Cf. my hypothesis about the strong theoretical link between Welsch's approach and Ortiz' *Counterpoint* as expressed in: Dagmar Reichardt. "On the Theory of a Transcultural Francophony: The Concept of Wolfgang Welsch and its Didactic Interest." *Transnational '900. Novecento transnazionale. Letterature, arti e culture / Transnational 20th century. Literatures, arts and cultures* 1.1 (2017), pp. 40-56. <<http://ojs.uniroma1.it/index.php/900Transnazionale/article/view/13821/13588>> (accessed Aug 30, 2017).

an updated and reworked theoretical concept of *transculturality*. Welsch, who had published in 1992 a first crucial essay in German dealing with transculturality (German: *Transkulturalität*),¹⁸ shares with Ortiz a pronounced interest in ethnography, anthropology and in the interdisciplinary ties between philosophy, contemporary life realities, and Natural Science, Economy (and Media) as well as Cultural Studies.¹⁹ In the third Millennium, Welsch not only confirms indirectly that “given the conditions shaping its international reception, Ortiz’ book has been read in ways that have overlooked aspects of its significance and have left its critical potential undeveloped,” as Fernando Coronil had put it,²⁰ but in an attempt to better connect Ortiz to contemporary social criticism and at the same time to carry forward his crucial idea about *transculturación*, Welsch expands and deepens his own approach, focusing more and more on Media Studies and on an autonomous postmodern concept of *transculturality*, leaving Ortiz’ Cuban blue-print behind and re-evaluating instead German Idealism in the 18th and 19th centuries in the context of cultural identity issues, one of them literature. Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744-1803) depiction of single cultural spheres as “autonomous islands” is particularly useful for Welsch in his attempt to create on this basis a contrasting juxtaposition, introducing a new metaphor in order to visualize contemporary transcultural structures: the ‘net,’ or, in his words, the “network” (German: *Netz*).²¹



18 Wolfgang Welsch. “Transkulturalität. Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen.” *Information Philosophie* 20.2 (1992), pp. 5-20.

19 Cf., e.g., the two audio-publications (CD) that Welsch recorded for a broader audience concerning questions relating to philosophy, anthropology and the natural sciences: Wolfgang Welsch. *Anthropologie. Vorlesung an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, 2006/07*. Ed. Bernd Ulrich. Müllheim/Baden: Auditorium Netzwerk, 2007 (12 CDs); Wolfgang Welsch. *Mensch und Welt. Vorlesung, gehalten an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Wintersemester 2008/09*. Ed. Bernd Ulrich. Müllheim/Baden: Auditorium Netzwerk, 2010 (1 CD, MP3-formatted).

20 Fernando Coronil. “Introduction” (note 14), p. X.

21 In this context, cf. Wolfgang Welsch’s essays: “Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today.” *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*. Ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash. London et al.: Sage, 1999, pp. 194-213 <http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/papers/W_Welsch_Transculturality.html> (accessed Aug 30, 2017); and also: “Netzdesign der Kulturen.” *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 1 (2002), pp. 86-88.

In the 1990s, Welsch may also have been in contact with the publications of Marie Louise Pratt (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 1992) and with the revival of Postcolonial Studies, which originated in the 1960s and 1970s and re-emerged at this time in the context of Globalization Studies. Methodologically speaking, Ortiz' study of the formation of a national culture in Cuba has significant implications, again, for contemporary Postcolonial Studies and therefore indirectly influenced Welsch's search for a new notion that might capture the innovative implications of postmodern times: digitalization, mobility, and the mutual interdependency of media and culture.

As I have elaborated already in 2006,²² the outstanding value of Welsch's new approach to Ortiz' research stems from the fact that Welsch tries to redefine the phenomenology of culture itself by considering, at the same time, the impact of cultural encounters and interactions in the light of what he defines as *transculturality*—a neologism as useful and necessary in postmodern times as the neologism *transculturation* introduced by Ortiz in the last historical phase of colonialism was then. This is why I will limit myself to what Welsch actually proposes as new creative insights, i. e., to what he programmatically adds as theoretical characteristics to the term *transculturation* that Ortiz introduced as an alternative concept to *acculturation*.

- 1) In postmodern times, around the turn of the Third Millennium, Welsch observes a new social structure of cultures: they interpenetrate, there is no 'third party' anymore. Rather, from the 1990s onwards it is all about mixing: for Welsch, we are all 'hybrids'—i. e., cultural mixtures, with multiple cultural origins.
- 2) Welsch insists on the fact that societies are incommensurable on a cultural level. That means that we no longer have highbrow-cultures on one side and lowbrow-cultures on the other.
- 3) When Welsch states that all individuals are characterized by a combination of horizontal and vertical transculturality, he intends to point out that no one has just 'some' transcultural sides or facets to his/her personality, but that all human beings are totally, by all means, and under all aspects epistemologically transcultural in relation to their interactions with others.
- 4) In fact, humans continuously exchange their way of life, their values and their *Weltanschauung* with fellow human beings, engaging in negotiations and interweaving their encounters with other humans into a 'network.'
- 5) As a result of this 'transcultural network,' we not only assist a dynamic of new connections: we experience social encounters (e. g., through immigration)

22 Please note that my essay "On the Theory of a Transcultural Francophony" (note 17), published in 2017, in which I have outlined the basic features of Welsch's theory, goes back to my first draft of this kind of analysis published already in 2006 in German under the title "Zur Theorie einer transkulturellen Frankophonie. Standortbestimmung und didaktische Relevanz." *PhiN: Philologie im Netz* 38 (2006) <<http://web.fu-berlin.de/phn/phn38/p38t2.htm>> (accessed Aug 30, 2017), pp. 32-51. In this article, I have tried to show the relevance of Welsch's approach by highlighting its applicability within the—comparative—research fields of Romance Studies, focusing particularly on Francophony as a worldwide project and research subject.

- and dislocations (e. g., through emigration) and by so doing, we build an international socialization.
- 6) Because of its 'nomadic' lifestyle and due to the transcultural characteristics of today's societies listed above, the postmodern subject does not necessarily identify him- or herself anymore through a geographical sense of belonging. Instead, Welsch defines 'home' as a cultural, human category, reminding the reader of the classical Roman dictum "*ubi bene, ibi patria*" meaning 'your home is where you feel good.'²³
 - 7) Last, but not least, *transculturality* implicates a commitment to a high level of awareness regarding communication issues and pacifist agreements. Transcultural postmodernity therefore stands for the use of a transversal reason that is against chauvinism (in terms of gender) and against fundamentalism (in terms of religion).

3. Case Study: Ennio Flaiano (1910-1972)

How can the notion of *transculturality* be productively applied to the research fields of Comparative Literature?

First, let us note that the *languages of theory* of both, Ortiz and Welsch, need to be methodologically contextualized with further basic theoretical approaches related to Migration and/or Transcultural Studies. From the endless variety of possible combinations and selections of theories and foci, it seems reasonable for the purposes of the following analysis—a case study of the colonial novel *Tempo di uccidere* (1947; *The Short Cut*) by the Italian writer and prolific cineaste Ennio Flaiano (1910-1972)—to add to Ortiz' (and/or Welsch's) category of *transculturation* (or *transculturality*), Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) concept of the South as counterpart, expressed by the Sardinian intellectual and writer in the 1920s when he wrote his essay *La questione meridionale* (1924/1966; *The Southern Question*).—In addition, Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) gender considerations about *La domination masculine* (1998; *Masculine Domination*) might be helpful to better understand Flaiano's autobiographical text. Finally, the depiction of late capitalism from a Marxist point of view, as outlined by Zygmunt Bauman (*Liquid Modernity*, 2000), as well as the psychological interpretation of the stranger, of exile, and of the 'Other' proposed by Julia Kristeva (*Étranges à nous-mêmes*, 1988; *Strangers to Ourselves*) are surely applicable and basically necessary to disclose the highly ambivalent, not-easy-to-grasp story written immediately after WWII in 1947 by the Abruzzese author Ennio Flaiano, who was originally from Pescara and who is well-known to a broader public as screenwriter for the film *La dolce vita* (1960), directed by Federico Fellini, starring the young Marcello Mastroianni alongside the Swedish shooting-star Anita Ekberg.

The journalist, novelist and satirical author Flaiano made colonial experiences himself in Eastern Africa during Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935/36.

23 Wolfgang Welsch. "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität?" [2010] <http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/papers/W_Welsch_Was_ist_Transkulturalit%C3%A4t.pdf> (accessed Aug 30, 2017), p. 15.

His first and only novel, *Tempo di uccidere*, is written against an autobiographical background and located in today's Ethiopia. It was written by Flaiano directly after the end of WWII, i. e., under the immediate impact of his war experiences, and awarded the inaugural Strega-Prize in 1947, the highest literary award in Italy. The novel, telling the story of a young lieutenant who meets an Ethiopian woman named Mariam after having deserted from his camp and who accidentally kills her after he has raped her, shows between the lines all the despair, self-reproach, uncertainties and paranoia of the nameless narrator. Tormented by his own deeds, he rejoins his fellow soldiers in the end but is torn by inner emptiness, by his own evasion of responsibility, and the absurdity not only of Italian colonialism, but of imperialism and war in general.

The universal story about anti-colonial stance and, yet, human tragic guilt was translated into English by the renowned Scottish translator, novelist and former controller of BBC Television Stuart Hood (1915-2011), who himself served in the British Army during WWII in Abyssinia, Iraq and North Africa as an Intelligence Officer, before spending a year in Italy as a prisoner of war and joining the Italian partisans in 1944, fighting against the Fascist militia and German troops in Italy. Hood's translation was first printed under the title *Mariam* (1949) and then repeatedly reissued in the United States under the title *The Short Cut* (Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1950; New American Library, 1951; The Marlboro Press, 1994).²⁴ In 1989, a movie adaptation with a soundtrack composed by Ennio Morricone was released under the original title *Tempo di uccidere* (English title: *Time to Kill*), showing scenes mostly filmed in Zimbabwe, all based on Flaiano's novel and directed by Giuliano Montaldo, starring Nicolas Cage (in the lead role), Ricky Tognazzi and Giancarlo Giannini. Both the novel and the film try to show —and to question—the deep ambivalence of humankind,²⁵ the injustice of Italy's empire-building ambitions in East Africa as a paradigm of colonial policy, cultural supremacy and historical memory, and the individual as well as the collective trauma of hegemonic violence and the fatal exertion of power.

Paradoxically, the main character in *The Short Cut* finds out that the final and intolerable punishment that threatens him is impunity. The literal translation of the quotation of the original title *Tempo di uccidere* is taken from the bible and refers to the verse: “[...] a time to kill and a time to heal, / a time to tear down and

24 For detailed information about the publishing history of Flaiano's novel in Italian and English language, cf. Marisa S. Trubiano. *Ennio Flaiano and his Italy: Postcards from a Changing World*. Cranbury/NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP/Rosemont, 2010, pp. 70ff.

25 I have analyzed the discourse of power and violence of Flaiano's novel and its connections to the methodological concept of transculturality more extensively in my essay: Dagmar Reichardt, “Discorsi di violenza nel *Volto Nascosto* (2007/2008) di Gianfranco Manfredi. Da *Tempo di uccidere* (1947) alla rappresentazione della guerra coloniale nel fumetto europeo.” *Violenza e transculturalità: il caso italiano (1990-2015)*. *Atti del convegno internazionale a Villa Vigoni, 8-10 ottobre 2014*. Eds. Dagmar Reichardt, Rotraud von Kulesa, Nora Moll, Franca Sinopoli. Frankfurt a. M. et al.: Peter Lang, 2017 [in print].

a time to build [...]” (*Ecclesiastes*, III, 3). Only the film title preserves this Jewish-Christian reference in the English translation, but in the critical Italian author Flaiano, who lived in a Catholic environment, this quote clearly represents a satirical, if not bitterly resigned comment. Even if the first encounter of the lieutenant with Mariam, who is taking a bath in a natural pool, naked like Eve under the apple-tree—“Among the trees there was a woman washing herself”²⁶—may well be read in the light of seduction and sin, there is no doubt that Flaiano’s choice to isolate the syntactic fragment “Time to Kill” in his title—*Tempo di uccidere*—conveys to the reader an impression of silent, but massive allegation against hypothetical authority, religion or utopia, one that cancels all the good out of the Old Testament *Kobelet*, leaving the reader with a feeling of complete disillusion and atheist loneliness.

The main character’s inner drama is, on a meta-level, the drama of a whole nation (Italy), a civilization (the Romans and the Italian Fascists) and a culture (Europe). Historically, his emotional vacuum stands for the emotional vacuum during and after WWII, the hubris of dictatorship (Mussolini), slavery (Italian colonialism), the Shoah (all genocides), as well as for all the colonial and imperialist violence committed by European nations and by the Western world in history.

From this perspective, Flaiano’s book appears prophetic. As we now know, post-colonial as well as postmodern historical phases imply exactly such an absence of stable common values, moral parameters and individual orientation. Instead, they leave people, communities and societies in an atmosphere of total betrayal, renunciation, and disorder. Rereading *The Short Cut* in the Third Millennium, the protagonist’s internal void is also symptomatic of modern consumerist society and of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in 1972, called *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (*Capitalism and Schizophrenia*), before outlining their transcultural concept of *Nomadology: The War Machine* (published as a separate book in English translation in 1986) in *Mille plateaux* (1980; *A Thousand Plateaus*), a study in which they reflected, amongst other things, on the relation between the state and its so-called war machine, i. e., the army, the warriors, who are seen as nomads that symbolize a subversive and anarchic, if dynamic anthropological vision.

4. Theoretical Perspectives

Let us conclude by summarizing some main points that make the application of Ortiz’ parameters in philological analysis seem if not, methodologically speaking, logical, then at least feasible, useful, advantageous and also reasonable. First, affinities are to be found in the circumstance that both authors, Ortiz and Flaiano, wrote their relevant texts in the 1940s (Ortiz published his *Contrapunteo* in 1940, Flaiano his novel *Tempo di uccidere* in 1947) after having made work

26 Ennio Flaiano. *The Short Cut*. Trans. Stuart Hood. Vermont/London: The Marlboro Press, 1994 [1950], p. 12. The original tone in Italian is as sober, but shows touch of a more poetic verbalization at the end: “Tra gli alberi c’era una donna che stava lavandosi” (Ennio Flaiano. *Tempo di uccidere*. With an introduction by Anna Longoni. Milano: Rizzoli, 2010, p. 36).

and live experiences abroad (Ortiz in his early years in Europe, Flaiano during his colonial experience 1935/36 in Africa), as well as the fact that both passed away as student activism peaked in Europe and the US around 1968 (Ortiz died in 1969, Flaiano in 1972). On top of that, rereading *Tempo di uccidere* through the lens of Ortiz' *transculturación* illustrates how the concept of hybridity was paradigmatically transcribed on a literary level overseas, in Europe/Italy, during the same decade.

Flaiano's Africa is "a place of contradiction," it defines the hybrid in-between-space in which "the narrator's view of himself" overlaps with "the reality he inhabits," while Italy's empire-building ambitions in East Africa are depicted as a "callous and doomed attempt to impose an uncomprehending system on a people,"²⁷ exactly as Ortiz finds the Cuban plantation system of tobacco and sugar. The opposition between the long period of Spanish colonial rule in Cuba (1515-1898) on one hand, and the indigenous cultural, ethnological and anthropological identity of *cubanidad* on the other, motivated Ortiz to propose a contrapuntal notion of dialogue, negotiation, encounter, and exchange. Edward W. Said's (1935-2003) technique of 'contrapuntal reading' is certainly also to be seen in this theoretical context,²⁸ even if Said pursued a primarily political interest in Postcolonial Studies in his seminal study on *Orientalism* (1978), unlike Ortiz in Transcultural—i. e., explicit culturally focused—Studies.

Applying Ortiz' main thesis to Flaiano's novel enables the reader to identify with the complex psychological, identitarian and also political situation of fusion, confusion, and loss (e. g., of the protagonist's homeland, native language, of his wife in Italy, of time as symbolized by his broken watch, of peace, stability, etc.) due to, as Kristeva would put it, the confrontation with the Other (the African culture, landscape and climate, the 'other' sex, i. e., women as embodied by Mariam, war as a state of exception, etc.). While Flaiano's implicit anti-colonial critique remains quite invisible, almost non-perceivable to the reader, what actually happens is that he doubles Gramsci's hypothesis about the subaltern South by applying Gramsci's Italy-related Marxist accusation about hegemonic neglect and the centralistic subjugation of Italy's southern regions to Italian East Africa (*Africa Orientale Italiana*), i. e., the Italian colony that in 1936 included and fused Italian Somaliland, Italian Eritrea and newly-conquered Italian Ethiopia. Using himself a *mise en abyme* or box-in-the-box-system, Flaiano thus anticipated an extension of Gramsci's *Southern Question* to what we call the question of the Global South today. Finally, the nucleus of the conflict-prone relationship between Flaiano's fictitious lieutenant and Mariam becomes retraceable from a postmodern view, if we consider—in addition to the highly precarious female subaltern status that Gayatri C. Spivak has exhaustively demonstrated at

27 Quotes are taken from the online book review posted on an ordinary personal blog, authored by Scott W.: "Ennio Flaiano: The Short Cut." 3.7.2015. <<http://seraillon.blogspot.ch/2015/07/ennio-flaiano-short-cut.html>> (accessed Aug 30, 2017).

28 Cf. Said's latest publications about arts, music and music theory: *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (2006); and *Music at the Limits* (2007), in which he picks up Ortiz' idea, first, to use a musical 'counterpoint'-technique in his writing and, secondly, to write expressly about this technique.

theoretical level in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1983),²⁹ but that, unfortunately, even in the Third Millennium has not yet been minimalized in practice—the still existing power-imbalance according to Bourdieu's gendering and his plea for the abolition of *La domination masculine*.

So, re-reading Flaiano's autobiographical text in terms of Ortiz' transcultural approach can help to grasp the duplicity and ambiguity of nature, history, politically motivated power discourses and the human quest for identity with the help of a concrete, realistic and society-related reflection that oscillates, as per Ortiz, between the poles of Marxist criticism and Magical Realism. Ortiz' notion of *transculturation* can be related to postmodernity (Precarity, Nomadism, Globalization) through Welsch's cultural concept of *transculturality*. In my view, the latter is visible already in Flaiano's post-war-novel: the states of transition that the protagonist experiences during his service in Africa are marked by hybridity as well as by the molding of a Third Space as per Bhabha, or as a transcultural *tertium quid* according to Ortiz and Welsch, at the same time aesthetically anticipating various social challenges to come in the post-war period and then culminating in the migration issues in the second half of the 20th century and lasting to this day.

In conclusion, applying Transcultural Studies to literary analysis by adopting Ortiz' neologism *transculturación* and updating according to today's necessities with the help of Welsch's theorem of *transculturality* can be considered an essential theoretical tool in order to disclose hidden narratives and verbally unrevealed layers in literary texts that deal with at least two different cultural spheres. In the interest of accurate and solid philological analysis, it is certainly advisable to also include critical positions on a national or linguistic identitarian level. Therefore, in order to argue in favor of a 'transcultural crises' as described in our case study, it would be surely be efficient to refer also to other approaches from Italian Studies and Italian literature. In the case of Flaiano these may include, besides Gramsci's basic statements, Dacia Maraini's (b. 1937) considerations of the Other as presented in *La seduzione dell'altrove* (2010), discussing the 'seduction of someplace else' from an Italian, yet cosmopolitan female writer's perspective after Flaiano's lifetime, or the exposure of Italy's long history of invasions by 'others,' foreigners and immigrants as explained by Maurizio Bettini and Alessandro Barbero (*Straniero. L'invasore, l'esule, l'altro*, 2012).

Finally, the critical voice of the Italo-American literary scholar and theorist of postmodernity Remo Ceserani (1933-2016) could further clarify how the application of Transcultural Studies might help to retain the best of Marxist criticism, so widely elaborated in academic Cultural Studies in the 20th century (mainly due to an international renaissance of Gramscian Studies in the 1980s), thus transmitting it successfully to the Third Millennium for the sake

29 Cf. Spivak's conclusive sentence to her crucial essay first published in 1983: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow..." (Gayatri C. Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. London/New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 24-28, p. 28).

of social values such as: social justice, equal rights and a fair consideration of the categories of race, class and gender. Ceserani's interpretation of Marx' antithesis between the 'solid state' and the 'liquid state'³⁰ refers to Zygmunt Bauman's (1925-2017) statement about a *liquid modernity*, a metaphor that immediately visualizes how we might imagine Welsch's transculturality alternatively to his own network-symbol. The felicitous illustration of the British-Polish sociologist and philosopher Bauman also pinpoints the shift in power relations in the late-capitalistic, postmodern and postcolonial era, transparently displaying the consideration (and sometimes inversion) of center and periphery. It is exactly this attitude that suggests the implementation in Comparative Studies not only of interdisciplinary approaches, e. g., by combining Literary with Cultural, Sociological, Philosophical or Media Studies, but also an integrative focus on theorists that might have hitherto been regarded as 'peripheral,' such as Fernando Ortiz, or writers that have also traditionally occupied 'peripheral' positions in the canon of World Literature, such as Ennio Flaiano.

Bauman's sequel volume entitled *Strangers at Our Door* (2016), however, insists that it is urgent to deal with postcolonial historical effects, with mass-migration and a world that is growing together, which are all significant topics in Transcultural Studies. Beyond accentuating the need for creating such specific academic frames and receptions within Transcultural Studies, let me finish by pointing out how important Translation and Comparative Studies are in this context. It may be sufficient to look only briefly at the history of the translation of Ortiz' *Contrapunteo*: after the aforementioned translations into English, the first of which dates back to 1947, there followed a 1987 translation into German. Unfortunately, though, the latter refers to Ortiz' 1940 edition and not to the final version that he had elaborated shortly before his death in 1965 (available today through Duke UP as a 1995 reprint), where Ortiz introduces the term of *transculturación* that the German edition completely deprives its readers of.³¹ In 2007, a translation into Italian followed, and in 2011 one into French.³²

30 Remo Ceserani. "Qualche considerazione sulla modernità liquida." *La modernità letteraria. Rivista a cura della MOD 3* (2010), pp. 11-25.

31 Fernando Ortiz. *Tabak und Zucker. Ein kubanischer Disput*. Trans. Maralde Meyer-Minnemann. Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1987. Please note that, without reference to Ortiz' term *transculturación*, the German subtitle also appears to be not entirely appropriate. It reduces the musicological and programmatic lexeme *contrapunteo* to a 'dispute,' which gives a false connotation to Ortiz' wording. This problem re-arises in the French translation, which also does not pick up the musical association (also first used by Theodor Adorno in his major musical-philosophical work *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, written during his emigration in the USA and published in 1949, and later on, by Edward Said, as mentioned above), translating, again, this word as 'controverse.' The point with the *contrapunteo* is that Ortiz intended to compose his written work in the form of a musical score, thus planning that the two parts would complement each other.

32 Fernando Ortiz. *Contrappunto cubano del tabacco e dello zucchero*. Trans. Antonio Melis. With an introduction by Bronislaw Malinowski. Troina: Città Aperta, 2007.—For the French translation, see note 2.

While the translational background of Ortiz' oeuvre may give us an idea of how essential translations are, not only in the academic sphere but also in the light of Communication Theory and in the interest of popularization in a world increasingly made up of interconnecting cultures, it is evident how crucial the term *transculturality* must be for Comparative Studies. In future times, it will certainly count among the main challenges of our discipline to analyze and compare more and more 'peripheral' works, re-writing national canons and acknowledging thus far excluded texts, texts that were often regarded as 'minoritarian' in the past. We therefore may conclude that books like Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere*, which may be considered 'the' novel of Italian colonialism, or other such key-texts—just think of historical titles like the *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Polish-British writer Joseph Conrad or of more modern literature like *Morenga* (1978) written by German contemporary author Uwe Timm—should be re-read not only from a postcolonial, but also expressly from a transcultural point of view in order to unveil their multiple intertextualities, their implicit invitations to communicate their European, Western and cosmopolitan profile, and their large potential to encourage a global cultural community of readers to empathize with world literature.

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